

OLYMPUS CAMEdia SP-500 UZ

quick view

PRICE £300

- SENSOR 1/2.5inch CCD (Total 6.37MP, Effective 6.0MP)
- LENS 38-380mm f2.8-3.7
- SHUTTER SPEEDS 15-1/1000sec
- EXPOSURE MODES M, A, AP, SP, P, 21 Scene
- FLASH 0.3m - 4.5m (W) 1.2m-3.4T, GN9
- ISO Auto, 80, 100, 200, 400
- MONITOR EVF 201,600 pixel/ 2.5inch 115,000 pixel TFT
- OTHER 320x240 30fps Video, 10Mb int, xD
- POWER 4xAA
- DIMENSIONS/WEIGHT 105.5x74.5x71mm/285g

6 mega pixels

top

Adjacent to the pop-up flash on the top plate of the camera sit the mode dial, AEL, shutter and Power On buttons

front

Investing in an TCON-17 adaptor enables conversion lens to be used with the SP-500 UZ

side

The USB and AV point is protected by a rubber cover, adjacent to the strap eyelet



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Olympus Camedia SP-500 UZ

Jamie Harrison tests a Superzoom camera that looks like it's a compact

Most Superzoom cameras are quite bulky compared to compact cameras. Some are even approaching the size of an SLR, albeit including a 10x or 12x zoom lens. Olympus, though, has taken a slightly different, although predictably Olympian, route. The new SP-500UZ is small, yet still manages to squeeze an awful lot into its diminutive stature.

Why is this predictably Olympian though? The company has always made a point of producing small but perfectly formed cameras. Look at the original mju cameras, the OM series, the Pen EE half frames. Olympus has always been slightly odd, too. Cameras such as the O product and Ecru displayed a forward-thinking design ethos, while in 1991 Olympus introduced the idea of the bridge camera, halfway between compact and SLR, which has defined the design ethos for most of the modern digital Superzoom. So what does Olympus do now? It designs a superzoom camera that looks more like a traditional compact.

SPECIFICATIONS

The SP-500 is well specified for such a small camera, with an impressive 38-380mm lens and large 2.5in LCD on the back. Like other cameras in the genre, the camera offers much for the enthusiast, including RAW recording and the full set of exposure controls, Program, Aperture priority, Shutter priority, and full Manual. For less experienced photographers or those who prefer the easy life, the SP-500 still allows automatic mode, as well as 21 scene modes.

Technology has also filtered down from the recent C-7070 model, including that camera's impressive Predictive AF system for tracking moving subjects, not to mention the company's IESP metering system, and 143 individual focus points, which can be linked to the spot metering function.

Many cameras of this size have forgone the viewfinder altogether, but Olympus has still managed to maintain an electronic version, with 201,600 pixels that manages to be sharp and detailed, with the added benefit of electronic readouts such as live his-

EVF

The SP-500 uses an electronic viewfinder which is reasonably clear and bright and shows all of the scene via a video feed from the CCD

LCD

The 2.5inch LCD monitor is a very useful size, and is bright and clear. The menu follows Olympus' usual rotary style front page, with nested sub menus



image quality

Exposure is one area I've never been able to criticise Olympus for: the company knows how to meter. Time after time despite the varying September conditions, the SP-500 produced perfectly exposed pictures. Image sharpness is a good point too, and despite worries that the lens could be overstretching itself, I was impressed with the results. At times, images look a tad over sharpened, especially JPEGs, though not with RAW. There's also the odd case of purple fringing, especially in high contrast conditions. Like pretty much every camera we test with small sensors, image noise is a problem, though lower ISO settings prove to be well controlled. Colour is good, though a little too saturated for my taste, and an Adobe RGB option would have been nice.

see more on the web

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to gram and AF/metering frames.

In many respects this is a camera that people have been crying out for. The price is good, at £300; the resolution at 6MP allows for reasonable A4 prints;

'In many respects this is a camera that people have been crying out for'

it's got plenty of photographic control and it easily fits into a pocket. Plus it's got that long lens. But it's not perfect.

There has to be compromises to fit the price and the plastic body isn't as tough as I'd like. It's not bad, but it isn't the same as last year's metal-bodied C-770 and C-765 cameras. It's also just a little bit bland to look at, and lacks the style of some other cameras at that price.

However the traditional looks may well work as an advantage, particularly in appealing to first-time digital buyers transferring from film, or for those who don't want a style statement but a good, functional camera... and there are plenty of those people about.

VERDICT

The SP-500 is competent and a truly useful camera. It acts like a compact, with the features of a superzoom, and is the ideal camera to chuck in your bag when you don't want to carry an SLR or other bigger camera. You won't be able to use it as a complete alternative to an SLR, but it's not a bad back up. Similarly at the price, if you want to try out digital and all it has to offer then you could do worse, while students could benefit from its budget price and traditional controls. I really like it.

WHAT DIGITAL CAMERA

specifications

MANUFACTURER: Olympus

MODEL: SP-500 Ultra Zoom

PRICE: £300

CCD: 1/2.5-inch 6.0MP eff/6.37MP total

MAX-PRINT-SIZE: 14.08 x 10.56-inch at 200dpi

LENS: 6.3 - 63mm f2.8-3.7 (35mm equ 38-380mm)

SHUTTER SPEEDS: 15-1/1000sec

ISO: Auto, 80, 100, 200, 400

EXP MODES: Auto, AP, M, P, SP, 21 scene modes

FLASH: GN9

DRIVE MODES: Single, burst, high-speed burst

METER: Digital ESP, spot, centre-weighted

WHITE BALANCE: A, 7preset, custom

FOCUS: Spot, iESP autofocus, Predictive AF, AF selectable from 143 points, Manual

VIEWFINDER: Electronic 201,600 pixels

MONITOR: 2.5-inch TFT LCD, 115,000 pixels

CONNECTION: USB 2.0, DC

REC FORMAT: Jpeg, RAW, QuickTime Motion Jpeg

FILE TYPE: Pictbridge, Pictbridge EasyPrint, Print Image Matching III, Exif 2.21, DPS and DPOF support

VIDEO OUTPUT: Pal

POWER: 4xAA

STORAGE: xD

OTHER: 320 x 240 at 30fps movie mode, panorama function, 3cm super macro

DIMENSIONS: 105.5 x 74.5 x 71mm

WEIGHT: 285g

scores

PROS: Good functionality, RAW, LCD and EVF

CONS: Bland looks, some fringing, some oversharpening and image noise

features	17
ease of use	16
image quality	18
design	17
value	18

86%

WDC